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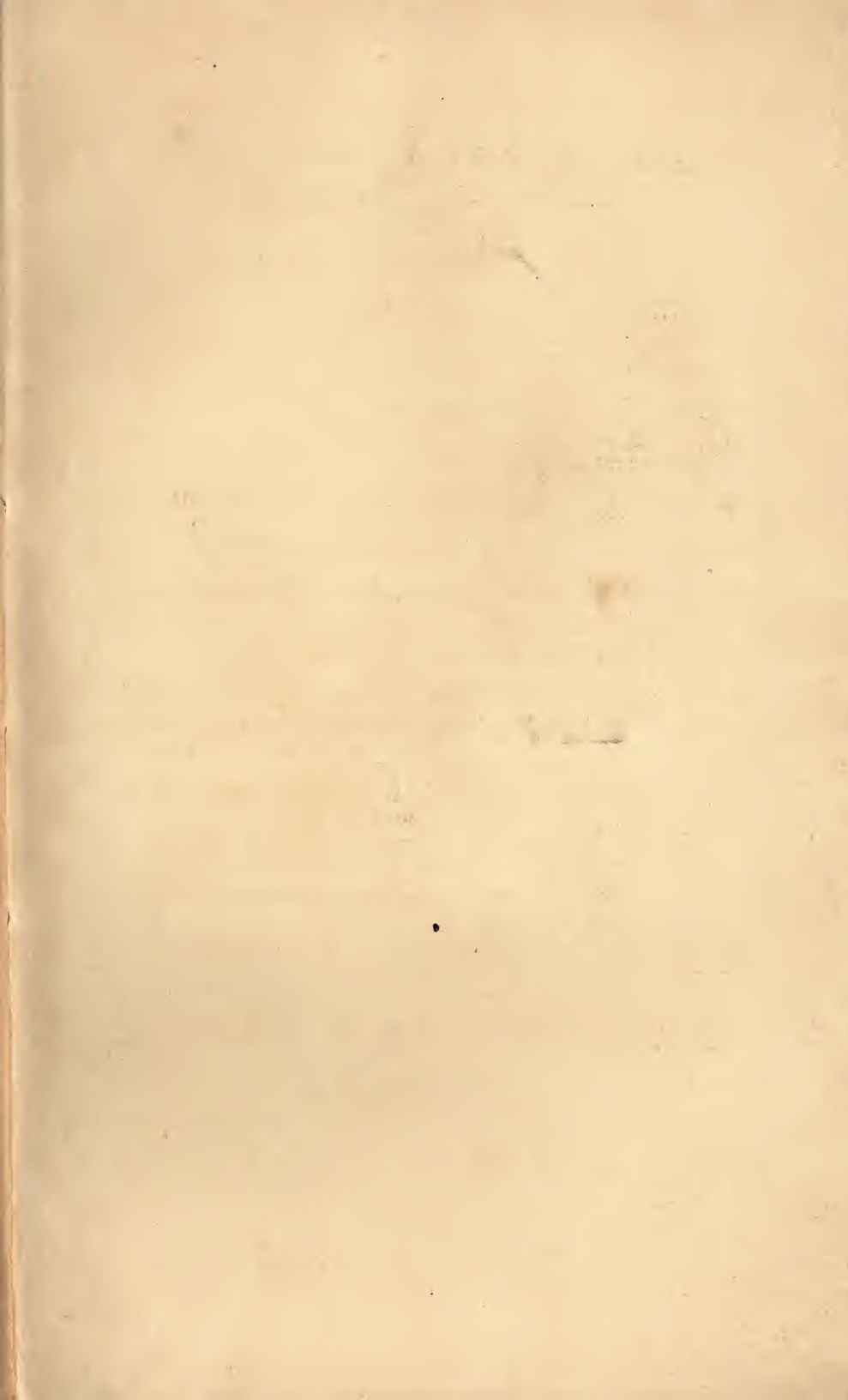
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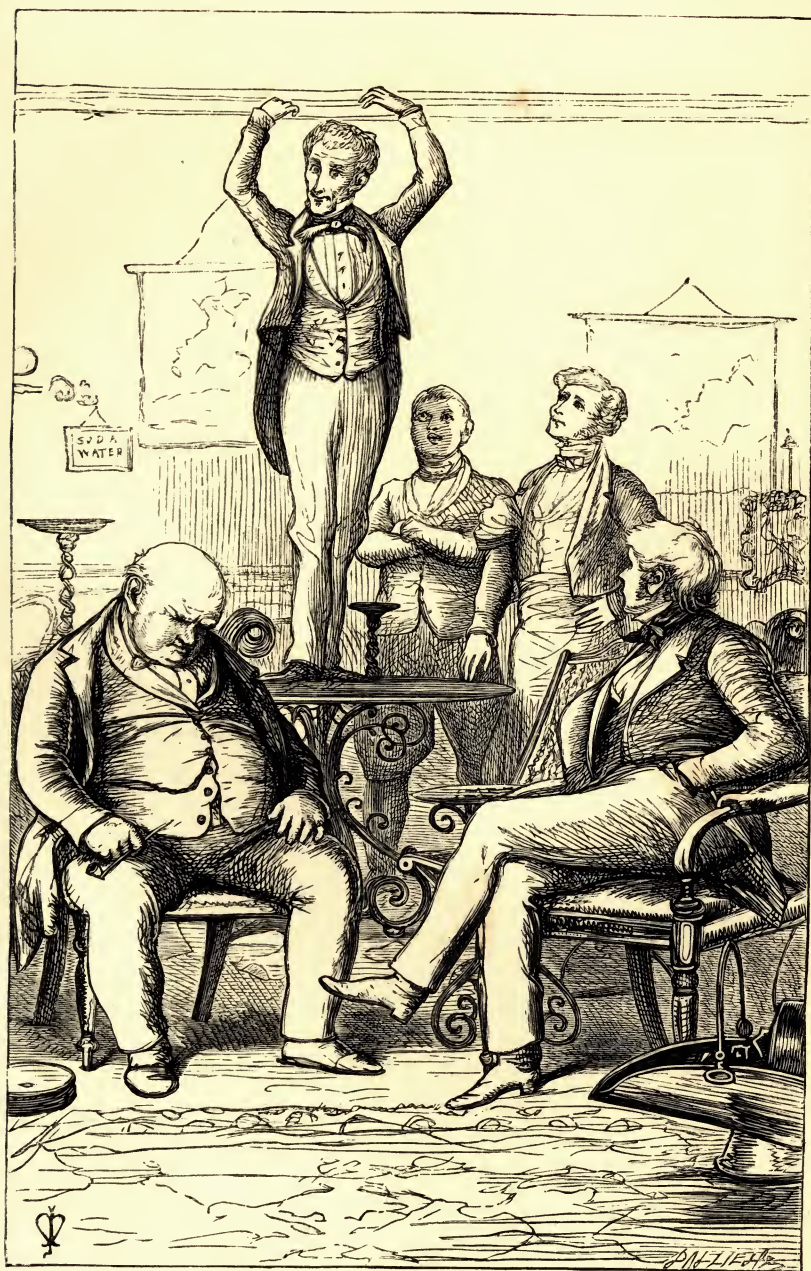
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CHAPTER V.

SIR PEREGRINE MAKES A SECOND PROMISE.

WE left Lady Mason very grateful at the end of the last chapter for the promise made to her by Sir Peregrine with reference to her son; but there was still a weight on Lady Mason's mind. They say that the pith of a lady's letter is in the postscript, and it may be that that which remained for Lady Mason to say, was after all the matter as to which she was most anxious for assistance. 'As you are here,' she said to the baronet, 'would you let me mention another subject?'

'Surely,' said he, again putting down his hat and riding-stick.

Sir Peregrine was not given to close observation of those around him, or he might have seen by the heightened colour of the lady's face, and by the slight nervous hesitation with which she began to speak, that she was much in earnest as to this other matter. And had he been clever in his powers of observation he might have seen also that she was anxious to hide this feeling. 'You remember the circumstances of that terrible lawsuit?' she said, at last.

'What; as to Sir Joseph's will? Yes; I remember them well.'

'I know that I shall never forget all the kindness that you showed me,' said she. 'I don't know how I should have lived through it without you and dear Mrs. Orme.'

'But what about it now?'

'I fear I am going to have further trouble.'

'Do you mean that the man at Groby Park is going to try the case again? It is not possible after such a lapse of time. I am no lawyer, but I do not think that he can do it.'

'I do not know—I do not know what he intends, or whether he intends anything; but I am sure of this,—that he will give me trouble if he can. But I will tell you the whole story, Sir Peregrine. It is not much, and perhaps after all may not be worth attention. You know the attorney in Hamworth who married Miriam Usbech?'

'What, Samuel Dockwrath? Oh, yes; I know him well enough; and to tell the truth I do not think very well of him. Is he not a tenant of yours?'

'Not at present.' And then Lady Mason explained the manner in which the two fields had been taken out of the lawyer's hands by her son's order.

‘Ah! he was wrong there,’ said the baronet. ‘When a man has held land so long it should not be taken away from him except under pressing circumstances; that is if he pays his rent.’

Mr. Dockwrath did pay his rent, certainly; and now, I fear, he is determined to do all he can to injure us.’

‘But what injury can Mr. Dockwrath do you?’

‘I do not know; but he has gone down to Yorkshire,—to Mr. Mason’s place; I know that; and he was searching through some papers of old Mr. Usbeck’s before he went. Indeed, I may say that I know as a fact that he has gone to Mr. Mason with the hope that these law proceedings may be brought on again.’

‘You know it as a fact?’

‘I think I may say so.’

‘But, dear Lady Mason, may I ask you how you know this as a fact?’

‘His wife was with me yesterday,’ she said, with some feeling of shame as she disclosed the source from whence she had obtained her information.

‘And did she tell the tale against her own husband?’

‘Not as meaning to say anything against him, Sir Peregrine; you must not think so badly of her as that; nor must you think that I would willingly obtain information in such a manner. But you must understand that I have always been her friend; and when she found that Mr. Dockwrath had left home on a matter in which I am so nearly concerned, I cannot but think it natural that she should let me know.’

To this Sir Peregrine made no direct answer. He could not quite say that he thought it was natural, nor could he give any expressed approval of any such intercourse between Lady Mason and the attorney’s wife. He thought it would be better that Mr. Dockwrath should be allowed to do his worst, if he had any intention of doing evil, and that Lady Mason should pass it by without condescending to notice the circumstance. But he made allowances for her weakness, and did not give utterance to his disapproval in words.

‘I know you think that I have done wrong,’ she then said, appealing to him; and there was a tone of sorrow in her voice which went to his heart.

‘No, not wrong; I cannot say that you have done wrong. It may be a question whether you have done wisely.’

‘Ah! if you only condemn my folly, I will not despair. It is probable I may not have done wisely, seeing that I had not you to direct me. But what shall I do now? Oh, Sir Peregrine, say that you will not desert me if all this trouble is coming on me again!’

‘No, I will not desert you, Lady Mason; you may be sure of that.’

‘Dearest friend!’

‘But I would advise you to take no notice whatever of Mr.

Dockwrath and his proceedings. I regard him as a person entirely beneath your notice, and if I were you I should not move at all in this matter unless I received some legal summons which made it necessary for me to do so. I have not the honour of any personal acquaintance with Mr. Mason of Groby Park.' It was in this way that Sir Peregrine always designated his friend's stepson—'but if I understand the motives by which he may probably be actuated in this or in any other matter, I do not think it likely that he will expend money on so very unpromising a case.'

'He would do anything for vengeance.'

'I doubt if he would throw away his money even for that, unless he were very sure of his prey. And in this matter, what can he possibly do? He has the decision of the jury against him, and at the time he was afraid to carry the case up to a court of appeal.'

'But, Sir Peregrine, it is impossible to know what documents he may have obtained since that.'

'What documents can do you any harm;—unless, indeed, there should turn out to be a will subsequent to that under which your son inherits the property?'

'Oh, no; there was no subsequent will.'

'Of course there was not; and therefore you need not frighten yourself. It is just possible that some attempt may be made now that your son is of age, but I regard even that as improbable.'

'And you would not advise me then to say anything to Mr. Furnival?'

'No; certainly not—unless you receive some legal notice which may make it necessary for you to consult a lawyer. Do nothing; and if Mrs. Dockwrath comes to you again, tell her that you are not disposed to take any notice of her information. Mrs. Dockwrath is, I am sure, a very good sort of woman. Indeed I have always heard so. But, if I were you, I don't think that I should feel inclined to have much conversation with her about my private affairs. What you tell her you tell also to her husband.' And then the baronet, having thus spoken words of wisdom, sat silent in his arm-chair; and Lady Mason, still looking into his face, remained silent also for a few minutes.

'I am so glad I asked you to come,' she then said.

'I am delighted, if I have been of any service to you.'

'Of any service! oh, Sir Peregrine, you cannot understand what it is to live alone as I do,—for of course I cannot trouble Lucius with these matters; nor can a man, gifted as you are, comprehend how a woman can tremble at the very idea that those law proceedings may possibly be repeated.'

Sir Peregrine could not but remember as he looked at her that during all those law proceedings, when an attack was made, not only on her income but on her honesty, she had never seemed to

tremble. She had always been constant to herself, even when things appeared to be going against her. But years passing over her head since that time had perhaps told upon her courage.

‘But I will fear nothing now, as you have promised that you will still be my friend.’

‘You may be very sure of that, Lady Mason. I believe that I may fairly boast that I do not easily abandon those whom I have once regarded with esteem and affection; among whom Lady Mason will, I am sure, allow me to say that she is reckoned as by no means the least.’ And then taking her hand, the old gentleman bowed over it and kissed it.

‘My dearest, dearest friend!’ said she; and lifting Sir Peregrine’s beautifully white hand to her lips she also kissed that. It will be remembered that the gentleman was over seventy, and that this pretty scene could therefore be enacted without impropriety on either side. Sir Peregrine then went, and as he passed out of the door Lady Mason smiled on him very sweetly. It is quite true that he was over seventy; but nevertheless the smile of a pretty woman still had charms for him, more especially if there was a tear in her eye the while;—for Sir Peregrine Orme had a soft heart.

As soon as the door was closed behind him Lady Mason seated herself in her accustomed chair, and all trace of the smile vanished from her face. She was alone now, and could allow her countenance to be a true index of her mind. If such was the case her heart surely was very sad. She sat there perfectly still for nearly an hour, and during the whole of that time there was the same look of agony on her brow. Once or twice she rubbed her hands across her forehead, brushing back her hair, and showing, had there been any one by to see it, that there was many a gray lock there mixed with the brown hairs. Had there been any one by, she would, it may be surmised, have been more careful.

There was no smile in her face now, neither was there any tear in her eye. The one and the other emblem were equally alien to her present mood. But there was sorrow at her heart, and deep thought in her mind. She knew that her enemies were conspiring against her,—against her and against her son; and what steps might she best take in order that she might baffle them?

‘I have got that woman on the hip now.’ Those were the words which Mr. Dockwrath had uttered into his wife’s ears, after two days spent in searching through her father’s papers. The poor woman had once thought of burning all those papers—in old days before she had become Mrs. Dockwrath. Her friend, Lady Mason, had counselled her to do so, pointing out to her that they were troublesome, and could by no possibility lead to profit; but she had consulted her lover, and he had counselled her to burn nothing. ‘Would that she had been guided by her friend!’ she now said to

herself with regard to that old trunk, and perhaps occasionally with regard to some other things.

‘I have got that woman on the hip at last!’ and there had been a gleam of satisfaction in Samuel’s eye as he uttered the words which had convinced his wife that it was not an idle threat. She knew nothing of what the box had contained; and now, even if it had not been kept safe from her under Samuel’s private key, the contents which were of interest had of course gone. ‘I have business in the north, and shall be away for about a week,’ Mr. Dockwrath had said to her on the following morning.

‘Oh, very well; then I’ll put up your things,’ she had answered in her usual mild, sad, whining, household voice. Her voice at home was always sad and whining, for she was overworked, and had too many cares, and her lord was a tyrant to her rather than a husband.

‘Yes, I must see Mr. Mason immediately. And look here, Miriam, I positively insist that you do not go to Orley Farm, or hold any intercourse whatever with Lady Mason. D’ye hear?’

Mrs. Dockwrath said that she did hear, and promised obedience. Mr. Dockwrath probably guessed that the moment his back was turned all would be told at the farm, and probably also had no real objection to her doing so. Had he in truth wished to keep his proceedings secret from Lady Mason he would not have divulged them to his wife. And then Mr. Dockwrath did start for the north, bearing certain documents with him; and soon after his departure Mrs. Dockwrath did pay a visit to Orley Farm.

Lady Mason sat there perfectly still for about an hour thinking what she would do. She had asked Sir Peregrine, and had the advantage of his advice; but that did not weigh much with her. What she wanted from Sir Peregrine was countenance and absolute assistance in the day of trouble,—not advice. She had desired to renew his interest in her favour, and to receive from him his assurance that he would not desert her; and that she had obtained. It was of course also necessary that she should consult him; but in turning over within her own mind this and that line of conduct, she did not, consciously, attach any weight to Sir Peregrine’s opinion. The great question for her to decide was this;—should she put herself and her case into the hands of her friend Mr. Furnival now at once, or should she wait till she had received some certain symptom of hostile proceedings? If she did see Mr. Furnival, what could she tell him? only this, that Mr. Dockwrath had found some document among the papers of old Mr. Usbeck, and had gone off with the same to Groby Park in Yorkshire. What that document might be she was as ignorant as the attorney’s wife.

When the hour was ended she had made up her mind that she would do nothing more in the matter, at any rate on that day.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COMMERCIAL ROOM, BULL INN, LEEDS.

MR. SAMUEL DOCKWRATH was a little man, with sandy hair, a pale face, and stone-blue eyes. In judging of him by appearance only and not by the ear, one would be inclined to doubt that he could be a very sharp attorney abroad and a very persistent tyrant at home. But when Mr. Dockwrath began to talk, one's respect for him began to grow. He talked well and to the point, and with a tone of voice that could command where command was possible, persuade where persuasion was required, mystify when mystification was needed, and express with accuracy the tone of an obedient humble servant when servility was thought to be expedient. We will now accompany him on his little tour into Yorkshire.

Groby Park is about seven miles from Leeds, and as Mr. Dockwrath had in the first instance to travel from Hamworth up to London, he did not reach Leeds till late in the evening. It was a nasty cold, drizzling night, so that the beauties and marvels of the large manufacturing town offered him no attraction, and at nine o'clock he had seated himself before the fire in the commercial room at The Bull, had called for a pair of public slippers, and was about to solace all his cares with a glass of mahogany-coloured brandy and water and a cigar. The room had no present occupant but himself, and therefore he was able to make the most of all its comforts. He had taken the solitary arm-chair, and had so placed himself that the gas would fall direct from behind his head on to that day's Leeds and Halifax Chronicle, as soon as he should choose to devote himself to local politics.

The waiter had looked at him with doubtful eyes when he asked to be shown into the commercial room, feeling all but confident that such a guest had no right to be there. He had no bulky bundles of samples, nor any of those outward characteristics of a commercial 'gent' with which all men conversant with the rail and road are acquainted, and which the accustomed eye of a waiter recognizes at a glance. And here it may be well to explain that ordinary travellers are in this respect badly treated by the customs of England, or rather by the hotel-keepers. All inn-keepers have commercial rooms, as certainly as they have taps and

bars, but all of them do not have commercial rooms in the properly exclusive sense. A stranger, therefore, who has asked for and obtained his mutton-chop in the commercial room of The Dolphin, The Bear, and The George, not unnaturally asks to be shown into the same chamber at the King's Head. But the King's Head does a business with real commercials, and the stranger finds himself—out of his element.

'Mercial, sir?' said the waiter at The Bull Inn, Leeds, to Mr. Dockwrath, in that tone of doubt which seemed to carry an answer to his own question. But Mr. Dockwrath was not a man to be put down by a waiter. 'Yes,' said he. 'Didn't you hear me say so?' And then the waiter gave way. None of those lords of the road were in the house at the moment, and it might be that none would come that night.

Mr. Dockwrath had arrived by the 8.22 P.M. down, but the 8.45 P.M. up from the north followed quick upon his heels, and he had hardly put his brandy and water to his mouth before a rush and a sound of many voices were heard in the hall. There is a great difference between the entrance into an inn of men who are not known there and of men who are known. The men who are not known are shy, diffident, doubtful, and anxious to propitiate the chambermaid by great courtesy. The men who are known are loud, jocular, and assured;—or else, in case of deficient accommodation, loud, angry, and full of threats. The guests who had now arrived were well known, and seemed at present to be in the former mood. 'Well, Mary, my dear, what's the time of day with you?' said a rough, bass voice, within the hearing of Mr. Dockwrath. 'Much about the old tune, Mr. Moulder,' said the girl at the bar. 'Time to look alive and keep moving. Will you have them boxes up stairs, Mr. Kantwise?' and then there were a few words about the luggage, and two real commercial gentlemen walked into the room.

Mr. Dockwrath resolved to stand upon his rights, so he did not move his chair, but looked up over his shoulder at the new comers. The first man who entered was short and very fat;—so fat that he could not have seen his own knees for some considerable time past. His face rolled with fat, as also did all his limbs. His eyes were large, and bloodshot. He wore no beard, and therefore showed plainly the triple bagging of his fat chin. In spite of his overwhelming fatness, there was something in his face that was masterful and almost vicious. His body had been overcome by eating, but not as yet his spirit,—one would be inclined to say. This was Mr. Moulder, well known on the road as being in the grocery and spirit line; a pushing man, who understood his business, and was well trusted by his firm in spite of his habitual intemperance. What did the firm care whether or no he killed himself by eating and drinking? He sold his goods, collected his

money, and made his remittances. If he got drunk at night that was nothing to them, seeing that he always did his quota of work the next day. But Mr. Moulder did not get drunk. His brandy and water went into his blood, and into his eyes, and into his feet, and into his hands,—but not into his brain.

The other was a little spare man in the hardware line, of the name of Kantwise. He disposed of fire-irons, grates, ovens, and kettles, and was at the present moment heavily engaged in the sale of certain newly-invented metallic tables and chairs lately brought out by the Patent Steel Furniture Company, for which Mr. Kantwise did business. He looked as though a skin rather too small for the purpose had been drawn over his head and face, so that his forehead and cheeks and chin were tight and shiny. His eyes were small and green, always moving about in his head, and were seldom used by Mr. Kantwise in the ordinary way. At whatever he looked he looked sideways; it was not that he did not look you in the face, but he always looked at you with a sidelong glance, never choosing to have you straight in front of him. And the more eager he was in conversation—the more anxious he might be to gain his point, the more he averted his face and looked askance; so that sometimes he would prefer to have his antagonist almost behind his shoulder. And then as he did this, he would thrust forward his chin, and having looked at you round the corner till his eyes were nearly out of his head, he would close them both and suck in his lips, and shake his head with rapid little shakes, as though he were saying to himself, ‘Ah, sir! you’re a bad un, a very bad un.’ His nose—for I should do Mr. Kantwise injustice if I did not mention this feature—seemed to have been compressed almost into nothing by that skin-squeezing operation. It was long enough, taking the measurement down the bridge, and projected sufficiently, counting the distance from the upper lip; but it had all the properties of a line; it possessed length without breadth. There was nothing in it from side to side. If you essayed to pull it, your fingers would meet. When I shall have also said that the hair on Mr. Kantwise’s head stood up erect all round to the height of two inches, and that it was very red, I shall have been accurate enough in his personal description.

That Mr. Moulder represented a firm good business, doing tea, coffee, and British brandy on a well-established basis of capital and profit, the travelling commercial world in the north of England was well aware. No one entertained any doubt about his employers, Hubbles and Grease of Houndsditch. Hubbles and Grease were all right, as they had been any time for the last twenty years. But I cannot say that there was quite so strong a confidence felt in the Patent Steel Furniture Company generally, or in the individual operations of Mr. Kantwise in particular. The world in Yorkshire

and Lancashire was doubtful about metallic tables, and it was thought that Mr. Kantwise was too eloquent in their praise.

Mr. Moulder when he had entered the room, stood still, to enable the waiter to peel off from him his greatcoat and the large shawl with which his neck was enveloped, and Mr. Kantwise performed the same operation for himself, carefully folding up the articles of clothing as he took them off. Then Mr. Moulder fixed his eyes on Mr. Dockwrath, and stared at him very hard. 'Who's the party, James?' he said to the waiter, speaking in a whisper that was plainly heard by the attorney.

'Gen'elman by the 8:22 down,' said James.

'Commercial?' asked Mr. Moulder, with angry frown.

'He says so himself, anyways,' said the waiter.

'Gammon!' replied Mr. Moulder, who knew all the bearings of a commercial man thoroughly, and could have put one together if he were only supplied with a little bit—say the mouth, as Professor Owen always does with the Dodoes. Mr. Moulder now began to be angry, for he was a stickler for the rights and privileges of his class, and had an idea that the world was not so conservative in that respect as it should be. Mr. Dockwrath, however, was not to be frightened, so he drew his chair a thought nearer to the fire, took a sup of brandy and water, and prepared himself for war if war should be necessary.

'Cold evening, sir, for the time of year,' said Mr. Moulder, walking up to the fireplace, and rolling the lumps of his forehead about in his attempt at a frown. In spite of his terrible burden of flesh, Mr. Moulder could look angry on occasions, but he could only do so when he was angry. He was not gifted with a command of his facial muscles.

'Yes,' said Mr. Dockwrath, not taking his eyes from off the Leeds and Halifax Chronicle. 'It is coldish. Waiter, bring me a cigar.'

This was very provoking, as must be confessed. Mr. Moulder had not been prepared to take any step towards turning the gentleman out, though doubtless he might have done so had he chosen to exercise his prerogative. But he did expect that the gentleman would have acknowledged the weakness of his footing, by moving himself a little towards one side of the fire, and he did not expect that he would have presumed to smoke without asking whether the practice was held to be objectionable by the legal possessors of the room. Mr. Dockwrath was free of any such pusillanimity. 'Waiter,' he said again, 'bring me a cigar, d'ye hear?'

The great heart of Moulder could not stand this unmoved. He had been an accustomed visitor to that room for fifteen years, and had always done his best to preserve the commercial code unsullied. He was now so well known, that no one else ever presumed to take

the chair at the four o'clock commercial dinner if he were present. It was incumbent on him to stand forward and make a fight, more especially in the presence of Kantwise, who was by no means stanch to his order. Kantwise would at all times have been glad to have outsiders in the room, in order that he might puff his tables, and if possible effect a sale;—a mode of proceeding held in much aversion by the upright, old-fashioned, commercial mind.

'Sir,' said Mr. Moulder, having become very red about the cheeks and chin, 'I and this gentleman are going to have a bit of supper, and it aint accustomed to smoke in commercial rooms during meals. You know the rules no doubt if you're commercial yourself;—as I suppose you are, seeing you in this room.'

Now Mr. Moulder was wrong in his law, as he himself was very well aware. Smoking is allowed in all commercial rooms when the dinner has been some hour or so off the table. But then it was necessary that he should hit the stranger in some way, and the chances were that the stranger would know nothing about commercial law. Nor did he; so he merely looked Mr. Moulder hard in the face. But Mr. Kantwise knew the laws well enough, and as he saw before him a possible purchaser of metallic tables, he came to the assistance of the attorney.

'I think you are a little wrong there, Mr. Moulder; eh; aint you?' said he.

'Wrong about what?' said Moulder, turning very sharply upon his base-minded compatriot.

'Well, as to smoking. It's nine o'clock, and if the gentleman——'

'I don't care a brass farthing about the clock,' said the other, 'but when I'm going to have a bit of steak with my tea, in my own room, I chooses to have it comfortable.'

'Goodness me, Mr. Moulder, how many times have I seen you sitting there with a pipe in your mouth, and half a dozen gents eating their teas the while in this very room? The rule of the case I take it to be this; when ——'

'Bother your rules.'

'Well; it was you spoke of them.'

'The question I take to be this,' said Moulder, now emboldened by the opposition he had received. 'Has the gentleman any right to be in this room at all, or has he not? Is he commercial, or is he —— miscellaneous? That's the chat, as I take it.'

'You're on the square there, I must allow,' said Kantwise.

'James,' said Moulder, appealing with authority to the waiter, who had remained in the room during the controversy;—and now Mr. Moulder was determined to do his duty and vindicate his profession, let the consequences be what they might. 'James, is that gentleman commercial, or is he not?'

It was clearly necessary now that Mr. Dockwrath himself should

take his own part, and fight his own battle. 'Sir,' said he, turning to Mr. Moulder, 'I think you'll find it extremely difficult to define that word;—extremely difficult. In this enterprising country all men are more or less commercial.'

'Hear! hear!' said Mr. Kantwise.

'That's gammon,' said Mr. Moulder.

'Gammon it may be,' said Mr. Dockwrath, 'but nevertheless it's right in law. Taking the word in its broadest, strictest, and most intelligible sense, I am a commercial gentleman; and as such I do maintain that I have a full right to the accommodation of this public room.'

'That's very well put,' said Mr. Kantwise.

'Waiter,' thundered out Mr. Moulder, as though he imagined that that functionary was down the yard at the taproom instead of standing within three feet of his elbow. 'Is this gent a commercial, or is he not? Because if not,—then I'll trouble you to send Mr. Crump here. My compliments to Mr. Crump, and I wish to see him.' Now Mr. Crump was the landlord of the Bull Inn.

'Master's just stepped out, down the street,' said James.

'Why don't you answer my question, sir?' said Moulder, becoming redder and still more red about his shirt-collars.

'The gent said as how he was 'mercial,' said the poor man. 'Was I to go to contradict a gent and tell him he wasn't when he said as how he was?'

'If you please,' said Mr. Dockwrath, 'we will not bring the waiter into this discussion. I asked for the commercial room, and he did his duty in showing me to the door of it. The fact I take to be this; in the south of England the rules to which you refer are not kept so strictly as in these more mercantile localities.'

'I've always observed that,' said Kantwise.

'I travelled for three years in Devonshire, Somersetshire, and Wiltshire,' said Moulder, 'and the commercial rooms were as well kept there as any I ever see.'

'I alluded to Surrey and Kent,' said Mr. Dockwrath.

'They're uncommonly miscellaneous in Surrey and Kent,' said Kantwise. 'There's no doubt in the world about that.'

'If the gentleman means to say that he's come in here because he didn't know the custom of the country, I've no more to say, of course,' said Moulder. 'And in that case, I, for one, shall be very happy if the gentleman can make himself comfortable in this room as a stranger, and I may say guest;—paying his own shot, of course.'

'And as for me, I shall be delighted,' said Kantwise. 'I never did like too much exclusiveness. What's the use of bottling oneself up? that's what I always say. Besides, there's no charity in it. We gents as are always on the road should show a little charity to them as aint so well accustomed to the work.'

At this allusion to charity Mr. Moulder snuffed through his nose to show his great disgust, but he made no further answer. Mr. Dockwrath, who was determined not to yield, but who had nothing to gain by further fighting, bowed his head, and declared that he felt very much obliged. Whether or no there was any touch of irony in his tone, Mr. Moulder's ears were not fine enough to discover. So they now sat round the fire together, the attorney still keeping his seat in the middle. And then Mr. Moulder ordered his little bit of steak with his tea. 'With the gravy in it, James,' he said, solemnly. 'And a bit of fat, and a few slices of onion, thin mind, put on raw, not with all the taste fried out; and tell the cook if she don't do it as it should be done, I'll be down into the kitchen and do it myself. You'll join me, Kantwise, eh?'

'Well, I think not; I dined at three, you know.'

'Dined at three! What of that? a dinner at three won't last a man for ever. You might as well join me.'

'No, I think not. Have you got such a thing as a nice red herring in the house, James?'

'Get one round the corner, sir.'

'Do, there's a good fellow; and I'll take it for a relish with my tea. I'm not so fond of your solids three times a day. They heat the blood too much.'

'Bother,' grunted Moulder; and then they went to their evening meal, over which we will not disturb them. The steak, we may presume, was cooked aright, as Mr. Moulder did not visit the kitchen, and Mr. Kantwise no doubt made good play with his unsubstantial dainty, as he spoke no further till his meal was altogether finished.

'Did you ever hear anything of that Mr. Mason who lives near Bradford?' asked Mr. Kantwise, addressing himself to Mr. Moulder, as soon as the things had been cleared from the table, and that latter gentleman had been furnished with a pipe and a supply of cold without.

'I remember his father when I was a boy,' said Moulder, not troubling himself to take his pipe from his mouth. 'Mason and Martock in the Old Jewry; very good people they were too.'

'He's decently well off now, I suppose, isn't he?' said Kantwise, turning away his face, and looking at his companion out of the corners of his eyes.

'I suppose he is. That place there by the road-side is all his own, I take it. Have you been at him with some of your rusty, rickety tables and chairs?'

'Mr. Moulder, you forget that there is a gentleman here who won't understand that you're at your jokes. I was doing business at Groby Park, but I found the party uncommon hard to deal with.'

'Didn't complete the transaction?'

'Well, no; not exactly; but I intend to call again. He's close enough himself, is Mr. Mason. But his lady, Mrs. M.! Lord love you, Mr. Moulder; that is a woman!'

'She is; is she? As for me, I never have none of these private dealings. It don't suit my book at all; nor it aint what I've been accustomed to. If a man's wholesale, let him be wholesale.' And then, having enunciated this excellent opinion with much energy, he took a long pull at his brandy and water.

'Very old fashioned, Mr. Moulder,' said Kantwise, looking round the corner, then shutting his eyes and shaking his head.

'May be,' said Moulder, 'and yet none the worse for that. I call it hawking and peddling, that going round the country with your goods on your back. It aint trade.' And then there was a lull in the conversation, Mr. Kantwise, who was a very religious gentle man, having closed his eyes, and being occupied with some internal anathema against Mr. Moulder.

'Begging your pardon, sir, I think you were talking about one Mr. Mason who lives in these parts,' said Dockwrath.

'Exactly. Joseph Mason, Esq., of Groby Park,' said Mr. Kantwise, now turning his face upon the attorney.

'I suppose I shall be likely to find him at home to-morrow, if I call?'

'Certainly, sir; certainly; leastwise I should say so. Any personal acquaintance with Mr. Mason, sir? If so, I meant nothing offensive by my allusion to the lady, sir; nothing at all, I can assure you.'

'The lady's nothing to me, sir; nor the gentleman either;—only that I have a little business with him.'

'Shall be very happy to join you in a gig, sir, to-morrow, as far as Groby Park; or fly, if more convenient. I shall only take a few patterns with me, and they're no weight at all;—none in the least, sir. They go on behind, and you wouldn't know it, sir.' To this, however, Mr. Dockwrath would not assent. As he wanted to see Mr. Mason very specially, he should go early, and preferred going by himself.

'No offence, I hope,' said Mr. Kantwise.

'None in the least,' said Mr. Dockwrath.

'And if you would allow me, sir, to have the pleasure of showing you a few of my patterns, I'm sure I should be delighted.' This he said observing that Mr. Moulder was sitting over his empty glass with the pipe in his hand, and his eyes fast closed. 'I think, sir, I could show you an article that would please you very much. You see, sir, that new ideas are coming in every day, and wood, sir, is altogether going out,—altogether going out as regards furniture. In another twenty years, sir, there won't be such a thing as a wooden table in the country, unless with some poor person that

can't afford to refurnish. Believe me, sir, iron's the thing nowadays.'

'And indian-rubber,' said Dockwrath.

'Yes; indian-rubber's wonderful too. Are you in that line, sir?'

'Well; no; not exactly.'

'It's not like iron, sir. You can't make a dinner-table for fourteen people out of indian-rubber, that will shut up into a box 3—6 by 2—4 deep, and 2—6 broad. Why, sir, I can let you have a set of drawing-room furniture for fifteen ten that you've never seen equalled in wood for three times the money;—ornamented in the tastiest way, sir, and fit for any lady's drawing-room or boodoor. The ladies of quality are all getting them now for their boodoors. There's three tables, eight chairs, easy rocking-chair, music-stand, stool to match, and pair of stand-up screens, all gilt in real Louey catorse; and it goes in three boxes 4—2 by 2—1 and 2—3. Think of that, sir. For fifteen ten and the boxes in.' Then there was a pause, after which Mr. Kantwise added—'If ready money, the carriage paid.' And then he turned his head very much away, and looked back very hard at his expected customer.

'I'm afraid the articles are not in my line,' said Mr. Dockwrath.

'It's the tastiest present for a gentleman to make to his lady that has come out since—since those sort of things have come out at all. You'll let me show you the articles, sir. It will give me the sincerest pleasure.' And Mr. Kantwise proposed to leave the room in order that he might introduce the three boxes in question.

'They would not be at all in my way,' said Mr. Dockwrath.

'The trouble would be nothing,' said Mr. Kantwise, 'and it gives me the greatest pleasure to make them known when I find any one who can appreciate such undoubted luxuries;' and so saying Mr. Kantwise skipped out of the room, and soon returned with James and Boots, each of the three bearing on his shoulder a deal box nearly as big as a coffin, all of which were deposited in different parts of the room. Mr. Moulder in the mean time snored heavily, his head falling on to his breast every now and again. But nevertheless he held fast by his pipe.

Mr. Kantwise skipped about the room with wonderful agility, unfastening the boxes, and taking out the contents, while Joe the boots and James the waiter stood by assisting. They had never yet seen the glories of these chairs and tables, and were therefore not unwilling to be present. It was singular to see how ready Mr. Kantwise was at the work, how recklessly he threw aside the whitey-brown paper in which the various pieces of painted iron were enveloped, and with what a practised hand he put together one article after another. First there was a round loo-table, not quite so large in its circumference as some people might think desirable, but, nevertheless, a round loo-table. The pedestal with

its three claws was all together. With a knowing touch Mr. Kantwise separated the bottom of what looked like a yellow stick, and, lo! there were three legs, which he placed carefully on the ground. Then a small bar was screwed on to the top, and over the bar was screwed the leaf, or table itself, which consisted of three pieces unfolding with hinges. These, when the screw had been duly fastened in the centre, opened out upon the bar, and there was the table complete.

It was certainly a 'tasty' article, and the pride with which Mr. Kantwise glanced back at it was quite delightful. The top of the table was blue, with a red bird of paradise in the middle; and the edges of the table, to the breadth of a couple of inches, were yellow. The pillar also was yellow, as were the three legs. 'It's the real Louey catorse,' said Mr. Kantwise, stooping down to go on with table number two, which was, as he described it, a 'chess,' having the proper number of blue and light-pink squares marked upon it; but this also had been made Louey catorse with reference to its legs and edges. The third table was a 'sofa,' of proper shape, but rather small in size. Then, one after another, he brought forth and screwed up the chairs, stools, and sundry screens, and within a quarter of an hour he had put up the whole set complete. The red bird of paradise and the blue ground appeared on all, as did also the yellow legs and edgings which gave to them their peculiarly fashionable character. 'There,' said Mr. Kantwise, looking at them with fond admiration, 'I don't mind giving a personal guarantee that there's nothing equal to that for the money either in England or in France.'

'They are very nice,' said Mr. Dockwrath. When a man has had produced before him for his own and sole delectation any article or articles, how can he avoid eulogium? Mr. Dockwrath found himself obliged to pause, and almost feared that he should find himself obliged to buy.

'Nice! I should rather think they are,' said Mr. Kantwise, becoming triumphant,—'and for fifteen ten, delivered, boxes included. There's nothing like iron, sir, nothing; you may take my word for that. They're so strong, you know. Look here, sir.' And then Mr. Kantwise, taking two of the pieces of whitey-brown paper which had been laid aside, carefully spread one on the centre of the round table, and the other on the seat of one of the chairs. Then lightly poising himself on his toe, he stepped on to the chair, and from thence on to the table. In that position he skilfully brought his feet together, so that his weight was directly on the leg, and gracefully waved his hands over his head. James and Boots stood by admiring, with open mouths, and Mr. Dockwrath, with his hands in his pockets, was meditating whether he could not give the order without complying with the terms as to ready money.

'Look at that for strength,' said Mr. Kantwise from his exalted position. 'I don't think any lady of your acquaintance, sir, would allow you to stand on her rosewood or mahogany loo table. And if she did, you would not like to adventure it yourself. But look at this for strength,' and he waved his arms abroad, still keeping his feet skilfully together in the same exact position.

At that moment Mr. Moulder awoke. 'So you've got your iron traps out, have you?' said he. 'What; you're there, are you? Upon my word I'd sooner you than me.'

'I certainly should not like to see you up here, Mr. Moulder. I doubt whether even this table would bear five-and-twenty stone. Joe, lend me your shoulder, there's a good fellow.' And then Mr. Kantwise, bearing very lightly on the chair, descended to the ground without accident.

'Now, that's what I call gammon,' said Moulder.

'What is gammon, Mr. Moulder?' said the other, beginning to be angry.

'It's all gammon. The chairs and tables is gammon, and so is the stools and the screens.'

'Mr. Moulder, I didn't call your tea and coffee and brandy gammon.'

'You can't; and you wouldn't do any harm if you did. Hubbles and Grease are too well known in Yorkshire for you to hurt them. But as for all that show-off and gimerack-work, I tell you fairly it aint what I call trade, and it aint fit for a commercial room. It's gammon, gammon, gammon! James, give me a bedcandle.' And so Mr. Moulder took himself off to bed.

'I think I'll go too,' said Mr. Dockwrath.

'You'll let me put you up the set, eh?' said Mr. Kantwise.

'Well; I'll think about it,' said the attorney. 'I'll not just give you an answer to-night. Good night, sir; I'm very much obliged to you.' And he too went, leaving Mr. Kantwise to repack his chairs and tables with the assistance of James the waiter.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MASONS OF GROBY PARK.

GROBY Park is about seven miles from Leeds, in the direction of Bradford, and thither on the morning after the scene described in the last chapter Mr. Dockwrath was driven in one of the gigs belonging to the Bull Inn. The park itself is spacious, but is flat and uninteresting, being surrounded by a thin belt of new-looking fir-trees, and containing but very little old or handsome timber. There are on the high road two very important lodges, between which is a large ornamented gate, and from thence an excellent road leads to the mansion, situated in the very middle of the domain. The house is Greek in its style of architecture,—at least so the owner says; and if a portico with a pediment and seven Ionic columns makes a house Greek, the house in Groby Park undoubtedly is Greek.

Here lived Mr. and Mrs. Mason, the three Misses Mason, and occasionally the two young Messrs. Mason; for the master of Groby Park was blessed with five children. He himself was a big, broad, heavy-browed man, in whose composition there was nothing of tenderness, nothing of poetry, and nothing of taste; but I cannot say that he was on the whole a bad man. He was just in his dealings, or at any rate endeavoured to be so. He strove hard to do his duty as a county magistrate against very adverse circumstances. He endeavoured to enable his tenants and labourers to live. He was severe to his children, and was not loved by them; but nevertheless they were dear to him, and he endeavoured to do his duty by them. The wife of his bosom was not a pleasant woman, but nevertheless he did his duty by her; that is, he neither deserted her, nor beat her, nor locked her up. I am not sure that he would not have been justified in doing one of these three things, or even all the three; for Mrs. Mason of Groby Park was not a pleasant woman.

But yet he was a bad man in that he could never forget and never forgive. His mind and heart were equally harsh and hard and inflexible. He was a man who considered that it behoved him as a man to resent all injuries, and to have his pound of flesh in all cases. In his inner thoughts he had ever boasted to himself that he

had paid all men all that he owed. He had, so he thought, injured no one in any of the relations of life. His tradesmen got their money regularly. He answered every man's letter. He exacted nothing from any man for which he did not pay. He never ill used a servant either by bad language or by over work. He never amused himself, but devoted his whole time to duties. He would fain even have been hospitable, could he have gotten his neighbours to come to him and have induced his wife to put upon the table sufficient food for them to eat.

Such being his virtues, what right had any one to injure him? When he got from his grocer adulterated coffee,—he analyzed the coffee, as his half-brother had done the guano,—he would have flayed the man alive if the law would have allowed him. Had he not paid the man monthly, giving him the best price as though for the best article? When he was taken in with a warranty for a horse, he pursued the culprit to the uttermost. Maid-servants who would not come from their bedrooms at six o'clock, he would himself disturb while enjoying their stolen slumbers. From his children he exacted all titles of respect, because he had a right to them. He wanted nothing that belonged to any one else, but he could not endure that aught should be kept from him which he believed to be his own. It may be imagined, therefore, in what light he esteemed Lady Mason and her son, and how he regarded their residence at Orley Farm, seeing that he firmly believed that Orley Farm was his own, if all the truth were known.

I have already hinted that Mrs. Mason was not a delightful woman. She had been a beauty, and still imagined that she had not lost all pretension to be so considered. She spent, therefore, a considerable portion of her day in her dressing-room, spent a great deal of money for clothes, and gave herself sundry airs. She was a little woman with long eyes, and regular eyelashes, with a straight nose, and thin lips and regular teeth. Her face was oval, and her hair was brown. It had at least once been all brown, and that which was now seen was brown also. But, nevertheless, although she was possessed of all these charms, you might look at her for ten days together, and on the eleventh you would not know her if you met her in the streets.

But the appearance of Mrs. Mason was not her forte. She had been a beauty; but if it had been her lot to be known in history, it was not as a beauty that she would have been famous. Parsimony was her great virtue, and a power of saving her strong point. I have said that she spent much money in dress, and some people will perhaps think that the two points of character are not compatible. Such people know nothing of a true spirit of parsimony. It is from the backs and bellies of other people that savings are made with the greatest constancy and the most satisfactory results.

The parsimony of a mistress of a household is best displayed on matters eatable;—on matters eatable and drinkable; for there is a fine scope for domestic savings in tea, beer, and milk. And in such matters chiefly did Mrs. Mason operate, going as far as she dared towards starving even her husband. But nevertheless she would feed herself in the middle of the day, having a roast fowl with bread sauce in her own room. The miser who starves himself and dies without an ounce of flesh on his bones, while his skinny head lies on a bag of gold, is, after all, respectable. There has been a grand passion in his life, and that grandest work of man, self-denial. You cannot altogether despise one who has clothed himself with rags and fed himself with bone-scrapings, while broad-cloth and ortolans were within his easy reach. But there are women, wives and mothers of families, who would give the bone-scrapings to their husbands and the bones to their servants, while they hide the ortolans for themselves; and would dress their children in rags, while they cram chests, drawers, and boxes with silks and satins for their own backs. Such a woman one can thoroughly despise, and even hate; and such a woman was Mrs. Mason of Groby Park.

I shall not trouble the reader at present with much description of the young Masons. The eldest son was in the army, and the younger at Cambridge, both spending much more money than their father allowed them. Not that he, in this respect, was specially close-fisted. He ascertained what was sufficient,—amply sufficient as he was told by the colonel of the regiment and the tutor of the college,—and that amount he allowed, assuring both Joseph and John that if they spent more, they would themselves have to pay for it out of the moneys which should enrich them in future years. But how could the sons of such a mother be other than spend-thrifts? Of course they were extravagant; of course they spent more than they should have done; and their father resolved that he would keep his word with them religiously.

The daughters were much less fortunate, having no possible means of extravagance allowed to them. Both the father and mother decided that they should go out into the county society, and therefore their clothing was not absolutely of rags. But any young lady who does go into society, whether it be of county or town, will fully understand the difference between a liberal and a stingy wardrobe. Girls with slender provisions of millinery may be fit to go out,—quite fit in their father's eyes; and yet all such going out may be matter of intense pain. It is all very well for the world to say that a girl should be happy without reference to her clothes. Show me such a girl, and I will show you one whom I should be very sorry that a boy of mine should choose as his sweetheart.

The three Misses Mason, as they always were called by the Groby Park people, had been christened Diana, Creusa, and Penelope, their mother having a passion for classic literature, which she indulged by a use of Lemprière's dictionary. They were not especially pretty, nor were they especially plain. They were well grown and healthy, and quite capable of enjoying themselves in any of the amusements customary to young ladies,—if only the opportunities were afforded them.

Mr. Dockwrath had thought it well to write to Mr. Mason, acquainting that gentleman with his intended visit. Mr. Mason, he said to himself, would recognize his name, and know whence he came, and under such circumstances would be sure to see him, although the express purpose of the proposed interview should not have been explained to him. Such in result was exactly the case. Mr. Mason did remember the name of Dockwrath, though he had never hitherto seen the bearer of it; and as the letter was dated from Hamworth, he felt sufficient interest in the matter to await at home the coming of his visitor.

'I know your name, Mr. Mason, sir, and have known it long,' said Mr. Dockwrath, seating himself in the chair which was offered to him in the magistrate's study; 'though I never had the pleasure of seeing you before,—to my knowledge. My name is Dockwrath, sir, and I am a solicitor. I live at Hamworth, and I married the daughter of old Mr. Usbech, sir, whom you will remember.'

Mr. Mason listened attentively as these details were uttered before him so clearly, but he said nothing, merely bowing his head at each separate statement. He knew all about old Usbech's daughter nearly as well as Mr. Dockwrath did himself, but he was a man who knew how to be silent upon occasions.

'I was too young, sir,' continued Dockwrath, 'when you had that trial about Orley Farm to have anything to do with the matter myself, but nevertheless I remember all the circumstances as though it was yesterday. I suppose, sir, you remember them also?'

'Yes, Mr. Dockwrath, I remember them very well.'

'Well, sir, my impression has always been that——' And then the attorney stopped. It was quite his intention to speak out plainly before Mr. Mason, but he was anxious that that gentleman should speak out too. At any rate it might be well that he should be induced to express some little interest in the matter.

'Your impression, you say, has always been——' said Mr. Mason, repeating the words of his companion, and looking as ponderous and grave as ever. His countenance, however, expressed nothing but his usual ponderous solemnity.

'My impression always was—that there was something that had not been as yet found out.'

‘What sort of thing, Mr. Dockwrath?’

‘Well; some secret. I don’t think that your lawyers managed the matter well, Mr. Mason.’

‘You think you would have done it better, Mr. Dockwrath?’

‘I don’t say that, Mr. Mason. I was only a lad at the time, and could not have managed it at all. But they didn’t ferret about enough. Mr. Mason, there’s a deal better evidence than any that is given by word of mouth. A clever counsel can turn a witness pretty nearly any way he likes, but he can’t do that with little facts. He hasn’t the time, you see, to get round them. Your lawyers, sir, didn’t get up the little facts as they should have done.’

‘And you have got them up since, Mr. Dockwrath?’

‘I don’t say that, Mr. Mason. You see all my interest lies in maintaining the codicil. My wife’s fortune came to her under that deed. To be sure that’s gone and spent long since, and the Lord Chancellor with all the judges couldn’t enforce restitution; but, nevertheless, I wouldn’t wish that any one should have a claim against me on that account.’

‘Perhaps you will not object to say what it is that you do wish?’

‘I wish to see right done, Mr. Mason; that’s all. I don’t think that Lady Mason or her son have any right to the possession of that place. I don’t think that that codicil was a correct instrument; and in that case of Mason versus Mason I don’t think that you and your friends got to the bottom of it.’ And then Mr. Dockwrath leaned back in his chair with an inward determination to say nothing more, until Mr. Mason should make some sign.

That gentleman, however, still remained ponderous and heavy, and therefore there was a short period of silence—‘And have you got to the bottom of it since, Mr. Dockwrath?’ at last he said.

‘I don’t say that I have,’ said the attorney.

‘Might I ask then what it is you purpose to effect by the visit with which you have honoured me? Of course you are aware that these are very private matters; and although I should feel myself under an obligation to you, or to any man who might assist me to arrive at any true facts which have hitherto been concealed, I am not disposed to discuss the affair with a stranger on grounds of mere suspicion.’

‘I shouldn’t have come here, Mr. Mason, at very great expense, and personal inconvenience to myself in my profession, if I had not some good reason for doing so. I don’t think that you ever got to the bottom of that matter, and I can’t say that I have done so now; I haven’t even tried. But I tell you what, Mr. Mason; if you wish it, I think I could put you in the way of—trying.’

‘My lawyers are Messrs. Round and Crook of Bedford Row. Will it not be better that you should go to them, Mr. Dockwrath?’

‘No, Mr. Mason. I don’t think it will be better that I should go to them. I know Round and Crook well, and don’t mean to say a word against them; but if I go any farther in this affair I must do it with the principal. I am not going to cut my own throat for the sake of mending any man’s little finger. I have a family of sixteen children, Mr. Mason, and I have to look about very sharp,—very sharp indeed.’ Then there was another pause, and Mr. Dockwrath began to perceive that Mr. Mason was not by nature an open, demonstrative, or communicative man. If anything further was to be done, he himself must open out a little. ‘The fact is, Mr. Mason, that I have come across documents which you should have had at that trial. Round and Crook ought to have had them, only they weren’t half sharp. Why, sir, Mr. Usbech had been your father’s man of business for years upon years, and yet they didn’t half go through his papers. They turned ’em over and looked at ’em; but never thought of seeing what little facts might be proved.’

‘And these documents are with you now, here?’

‘No, Mr. Mason, I am not so soft as that. I never carry about original documents unless when ordered to prove. Copies of one or two items I have made; not regular copies, Mr. Mason, but just a line or two to refresh my memory.’ And Mr. Dockwrath took a small letter-case out of his breast coat pocket.

By this time Mr. Mason’s curiosity had been roused, and he began to think it possible that his visitor had discovered information which might be of importance to him. ‘Are you going to show me any document?’ said he.

‘That’s as may be,’ said the attorney. ‘I don’t know as yet whether you care to see it. I have come a long way to do you a service, and it seems to me you are rather shy of coming forward to meet me. As I said before, I’ve a very heavy family, and I’m not going to cut the nose off my own face to put money into any other man’s pocket. What do you think my journey down here will cost me, including loss of time, and interruption to my business?’

‘Look here, Mr. Dockwrath; if you are really able to put me into possession of any facts regarding the Orley Farm estate which I ought to know, I will see that you are compensated for your time and trouble. Messrs. Round and Crook—’

‘I’ll have nothing to do with Round and Crook. So that’s settled, Mr. Mason.’

‘Then, Mr. Dockwrath—’

‘Half a minute, Mr. Mason. I’ll have nothing to do with Round and Crook; but as I know you to be a gentleman and a man of honour, I’ll put you in possession of what I’ve discovered, and leave it to you afterwards to do what you think right about my expenses, time, and services. You won’t forget that it is a long

way from Hamworth to Groby Park. And if you should succeed——’

‘If I am to look at this document, I must do so without pledging myself to anything,’ said Mr. Mason, still with much solemnity. He had great doubts as to his new acquaintance, and much feared that he was derogating from his dignity as a county magistrate and owner of Groby Park in holding any personal intercourse with him; but nevertheless he could not resist the temptation. He most firmly believed that that codicil had not expressed the genuine last will and fair disposition of property made by his father, and it might certainly be the case that proof of all that he believed was to be found among the papers of the old lawyer. He hated Lady Mason with all his power of hatred, and if there did, even yet, exist for him a chance of upsetting her claims and ruining her before the world, he was not the man to forego that chance.

‘Well, sir, you shall see it,’ said Mr. Dockwrath; ‘or rather hear it, for there is not much to see.’ And so saying he extracted from his pocket-book a very small bit of paper.

‘I should prefer to read it, if it’s all the same to you, Mr. Dockwrath. I shall understand it much better in that way.’

‘As you like, Mr. Mason,’ said the attorney, handing him the small bit of paper. ‘You will understand, sir, that it’s no real copy, but only a few dates and particulars, just jotted down to assist my own memory.’ The document, supported by which Mr. Dockwrath had come down to Yorkshire, consisted of half a sheet of note paper, and the writing upon this covered hardly the half of it. The words which Mr. Mason read were as follows:—

‘Date of codicil. 14th July 18—.

‘Witnesses to the instrument. John Kenneby; Bridget Bolster; Jonathan Usbech. N.B. Jonathan Usbech died before the testator.

‘Mason and Martock. Deed of separation; dated 14th July 18—.

‘Executed at Orley Farm.

‘Witnesses John Kenneby; and Bridget Bolster. Deed was prepared in the office of Jonathan Usbech, and probably executed in his presence.’

That was all that was written on the paper, and Mr. Mason read the words to himself three times before he looked up, or said anything concerning them. He was not a man quick at receiving new ideas into his mind, or of understanding new points; but that which had once become intelligible to him and been made his own, remained so always. ‘Well,’ said he, when he read the above words for the third time.

‘You don’t see it, sir?’ said Mr. Dockwrath.

‘See what?’ said Mr. Mason, still looking at the scrap of paper.

‘Why; the dates, to begin with.’

I see that the dates are the same ;—the 14th of July in the same year.'

'Well,' said Mr. Dockwrath, looking very keenly into the magistrate's face.

'Well,' said Mr. Mason, looking over the paper at his boot.

'John Kenneby and Bridget Bolster were witnesses to both the instruments,' said the attorney.

'So I see,' said the magistrate.

'But I don't remember that it came out in evidence that either of them recollected having been called on for two signatures on the same day.'

'No ; there was nothing of that came out ;—or was even hinted at.'

'No ; nothing even hinted at, Mr. Mason,—as you justly observe. That is what I mean by saying that Round and Crook's people didn't get up their little facts. Believe me, sir, there are men in the profession out of London who know quite as much as Round and Crook. They ought to have had those facts, seeing that the very copy of the document was turned over by their hands.' And Mr. Dockwrath hit the table heavily in the warmth of his indignation against his negligent professional brethren. Earlier in the interview Mr. Mason would have been made very angry by such freedom, but he was not angry now.

'Yes ; they ought to have known it,' said he. But he did not even yet see the point. He merely saw that there was a point worth seeing.

'Known it ! Of course they ought to have known it. Look here, Mr. Mason ! If I had it on my mind that I'd thrown over a client of mine by such carelessness as that, I'd—I'd strike my own name off the rolls ; I would indeed. I never could look a counsel in the face again, if I'd neglected to brief him with such facts as those. I suppose it was carelessness ; eh, Mr. Mason ?'

'Oh, yes ; I'm afraid so,' said Mr. Mason, still rather in the dark.

'They could have had no object in keeping it back, I should say.'

'No ; none in life. But let us see, Mr. Dockwrath ; how does it bear upon us ? The dates are the same, and the witnesses the same.'

'The deed of separation is genuine. There is no doubt about that.'

'Oh ; you're sure of that ?'

'Quite certain. I found it entered in the old office books. It was the last of a lot of such documents executed between Mason and Martock after the old man gave up the business. You see she was always with him, and knew all about it.'

‘About the partnership deed?’

‘Of course she did. She’s a clever woman, Mr. Mason; very clever, and it’s almost a pity that she should come to grief. She has carried it on so well; hasn’t she?’

Mr. Mason’s face now became very black. ‘Why,’ said he, ‘if what you seem to allege be true, she must be a—a—a—. What do you mean, sir, by pity?’

Mr. Dockwrath shrugged his shoulders. ‘It is very blue,’ said he, ‘uncommon blue.’

‘She must be a swindler; a common swindler. Nay, worse than that.’

‘Oh, yes, a deal worse than that, Mr. Mason. And as for common;—according to my way of thinking there’s nothing at all common about it. I look upon it as about the best got-up plant I ever remember to have heard of. I do, indeed, Mr. Mason.’ The attorney during the last ten minutes of the conversation had quite altered his tone, understanding that he had already achieved a great part of his object; but Mr. Mason in his intense anxiety did not observe this. Had Mr. Dockwrath, in commencing the conversation, talked about ‘plants’ and ‘blue,’ Mr. Mason would probably have rung his bell for the servant. ‘If it’s anything, it’s forgery,’ said Mr. Dockwrath, looking his companion full in the face.

‘I always felt sure that my father never intended to sign such a codicil as that.’

‘He never did sign it, Mr. Mason.’

‘And,—and the witnesses!’ said Mr. Mason, still not enlightened as to the true extent of the attorney’s suspicion.

‘They signed the other deed; that is two of them did. There is no doubt about that;—on that very day. They certainly did witness a signature made by the old gentleman in his own room on that 14th of July. The original of that document, with the date and their names, will be forthcoming soon enough.’

‘Well,’ said Mr. Mason.

‘But they did not witness two signatures.’

‘You think not, eh!’

‘I’m sure of it. The girl Bolster would have remembered it, and would have said so. She was sharp enough.’

‘Who wrote all the names then at the foot of the will?’ said Mr. Mason.

‘Ah! that’s the question. Who did write them? We know very well, Mr. Mason, you and I that is, who did not. And having come to that, I think we may give a very good guess who did.’

And then they both sat silent for some three or four minutes. Mr. Dockwrath was quite at his ease, rubbing his chin with his hand, playing with a paper-knife which he had taken from the study table, and waiting till it should please Mr. Mason to renew

the conversation. Mr. Mason was not at his ease, though all idea of affecting any reserve before the attorney had left him. He was thinking how best he might confound and destroy the woman who had robbed him for so many years; who had defied him, got the better of him, and put him to terrible cost; who had vexed his spirit through his whole life, deprived him of content, and had been to him as a thorn ever present in a festering sore. He had always believed that she had defrauded him, but this belief had been qualified by the unbelief of others. It might have been, he had half thought, that the old man had signed the codicil in his dotage, having been cheated and bullied into it by the woman. There had been no day in her life on which he would not have ruined her, had it been in his power to do so. But now—now, new and grander ideas were breaking in upon his mind. Could it be possible that he might live to see her, not merely deprived of her ill-gained money, but standing in the dock as a felon to receive sentence for her terrible misdeeds? If that might be so, would he not receive great compensation for all that he had suffered? Would it not be sweet to his sense of justice that both of them should thus at last have their own? He did not even yet understand all that Mr. Dockwrath suspected. He did not fully perceive why the woman was supposed to have chosen as the date of her forgery, the date of that other genuine deed. But he did understand, he did perceive—at least so he thought,—that new and perhaps conclusive evidence of her villainy was at last within his reach.

‘And what shall we do now, Mr. Dockwrath?’ he said at last.

‘Well; am I to understand that you do me the honour of asking my advice upon that question as being your lawyer?’

This question immediately brought Mr. Mason back to business that he did understand. ‘A man in my position cannot very well change his legal advisers at a moment’s notice. You must be very well aware of that, Mr. Dockwrath. Messrs. Round and Crook—’

‘Messrs. Round and Crook, sir, have neglected your business in a most shameful manner. Let me tell you that, sir.’

‘Well; that’s as may be. I’ll tell you what I’ll do, Mr. Dockwrath; I’ll think over this matter in quiet, and then I’ll come up to town. Perhaps when there I may expect the honour of a further visit from you.’

‘And you won’t mention the matter to Round and Crook?’

‘I can’t undertake to say that, Mr. Dockwrath. I think it will perhaps be better that I should mention it, and then see you afterwards.’

‘And how about my expenses down here?’

Just at this moment there came a light tap at the study door, and before the master of the house could give or withhold permission

the mistress of the house entered the room. 'My dear,' she said, 'I didn't know that you were engaged.'

'Yes, I am engaged,' said the gentleman.

'Oh, I'm sure I beg pardon. Perhaps this is the gentleman from Hamworth?'

'Yes, ma'am,' said Mr. Dockwrath. 'I am the gentleman from Hamworth. I hope I have the pleasure of seeing you very well, ma'am?' And getting up from his chair he bowed politely.

'Mr. Dockwrath, Mrs. Mason,' said the lady's husband, introducing them; and then Mrs. Mason curtsied to the stranger. She too was very anxious to know what might be the news from Hamworth.

'Mr. Dockwrath will lunch with us, my dear,' said Mr. Mason. And then the lady, on hospitable cares intent, left them again to themselves.

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. MASON'S HOT LUNCHEON.

THOUGH Mr. Dockwrath was somewhat elated by this invitation to lunch, he was also somewhat abashed by it. He had been far from expecting that Mr. Mason of Groby Park would do him any such honour, and was made aware by it of the great hold which he must have made upon the attention of his host. But nevertheless he immediately felt that his hands were to a certain degree tied. He, having been invited to sit down at Mr. Mason's table, with Mrs. M. and the family,—having been treated as though he were a gentleman, and thus being for the time put on a footing of equality with the county magistrate, could not repeat that last important question: 'How about my expenses down here?' nor could he immediately go on with the grand subject in any frame of mind which would tend to further his own interests. Having been invited to lunch he could not haggle with due persistency for his share of the business in crushing Lady Mason, nor stipulate that the whole concern should not be trusted to the management of Round and Crook. As a source of pride this invitation to eat was pleasant to him, but he was forced to acknowledge to himself that it interfered with business.

Nor did Mr. Mason feel himself ready to go on with the conversation in the manner in which it had been hitherto conducted. His mind was full of Orley Farm and his wrongs, and he could bring himself to think of nothing else; but he could no longer talk about it to the attorney sitting there in his study. 'Will you take a turn about the place while the lunch is getting ready?' he said. So they took their hats and went out into the garden.

'It is dreadful to think of,' said Mr. Mason, after they had twice walked in silence the length of a broad gravel terrace.

'What; about her ladyship?' said the attorney.

'Quite dreadful!' and Mr. Mason shuddered. 'I don't think I ever heard of anything so shocking in my life. For twenty years, Mr. Dockwrath, think of that. Twenty years!' and his face as he spoke became almost black with horror.

'It is very shocking,' said Mr. Dockwrath; 'very shocking. What on earth will be her fate if it be proved against her? She has brought it on herself; that is all that one can say of her.'

'D—— her! d—— her!' exclaimed the other, gnashing his teeth with concentrated wrath. 'No punishment will be bad enough for her. Hanging would not be bad enough.'

'They can't hang her, Mr. Mason,' said Mr. Dockwrath, almost frightened by the violence of his companion.

'No; they have altered the laws, giving every encouragement to forgers, villains, and perjurers. But they can give her penal servitude for life. They must do it.'

'She is not convicted yet, you know.'

'D—— her!' repeated the owner of Groby Park again, as he thought of his twenty years of loss. Eight hundred a year for twenty years had been taken away from him; and he had been worsted before the world after a hard fight. 'D—— her!' he continued in a growl between his teeth. Mr. Dockwrath when he had first heard his companion say how horrid and dreadful the affair was, had thought that Mr. Mason was alluding to the condition in which the lady had placed herself by her assumed guilt. But it was of his own condition that he was speaking. The idea which shocked him was the thought of the treatment which he himself had undergone. The dreadful thing at which he shuddered was his own ill usage. As for her;—pity for her! Did a man ever pity a rat that had eaten into his choicest dainties?

'The lunch is on the table, sir,' said the Groby Park footman in the Groby Park livery. Under the present household arrangement of Groby Park all the servants lived on board wages. Mrs. Mason did not like this system, though it had about it certain circumstances of economy which recommended it to her; it interfered greatly with the stringent aptitudes of her character and the warmest passion of her heart; it took away from her the delicious power of serving out the servants' food, of locking up the scraps of meat, and of charging the maids with voracity. But, to tell the truth, Mr. Mason had been driven by sheer necessity to take this step, as it had been found impossible to induce his wife to give out sufficient food to enable the servants to live and work. She knew that in not doing so she injured herself; but she could not do it. The knife in passing through the loaf would make the portion to be parted with less by one third than the portion to be retained. Half a pound of salt butter would reduce itself to a quarter of a pound. Portions of meat would become infinitesimal. When standing with viands before her, she had not free will over her hands. She could not bring herself to part with victuals, though she might ruin herself by retaining them. Therefore, by the order of the master, were the servants placed on board wages.

Mr. Dockwrath soon found himself in the dining-room, where the three young ladies with their mamma were already seated at the table. It was a handsome room, and the furniture was handsome; but nevertheless it was a heavy room, and the furniture was heavy. The table was large enough for a party of twelve, and might have borne a noble banquet; as it was the promise was not bad, for there were three large plated covers concealing hot viands, and in some houses lunch means only bread and cheese.

Mr. Mason went through a form of introduction between Mr. Dockwrath and his daughters. 'That is Miss Mason, that Miss Creusa Mason, and this Miss Penelope. John, remove the covers.' And the covers were removed, John taking them from the table with a magnificent action of his arm which I am inclined to think was not innocent of irony. On the dish before the master of the house,—a large dish which must I fancy have been selected by the cook with some similar attempt at sarcasm,—there reposed three scraps, as to the nature of which Mr. Dockwrath, though he looked hard at them, was unable to enlighten himself. But Mr. Mason knew them well, as he now placed his eyes on them for the third time. They were old enemies of his, and his brow again became black as he looked at them. The scraps in fact consisted of two drumsticks of a fowl and some indescribable bone out of the back of the same. The original bird had no doubt first revealed all its glories to human eyes,—presuming the eyes of the cook to be inhuman—in Mrs. Mason's 'boodoor.' Then, on the dish before the lady, there were three other morsels, black-looking and very suspicious to the eye, which in the course of conversation were proclaimed to be ham,—broiled ham. Mrs. Mason would never allow a ham in its proper shape to come into the room, because it is an article upon which the guests are themselves supposed to operate with the carving-knife. Lastly, on the dish before Miss Creusa there reposed three potatoes.

The face of Mr. Mason became very black as he looked at the banquet which was spread upon his board, and Mrs. Mason, eyeing him across the table, saw that it was so. She was not a lady who despised such symptoms in her lord, or disregarded in her valour the violence of marital storms. She had quailed more than once or twice under rebuke occasioned by her great domestic virtue, and knew that her husband, though he might put up with much as regarded his own comfort and that of his children, could be very angry at injuries done to his household honour and character as a hospitable English country gentleman.

Consequently the lady smiled and tried to look self-satisfied as she invited her guest to eat. 'This is ham,' said she with a little simper, 'broiled ham, Mr. Dockwrath; and there is chicken at the other; end I think they call it—devilled.'

'Shall I assist the young ladies to anything first?' said the attorney, wishing to be polite.

'Nothing, thank you,' said Miss Penelope, with a very stiff bow. She also knew that Mr. Dockwrath was an attorney from Hamworth, and considered herself by no means bound to hold any sort of conversation with him.

'My daughters only eat bread and butter in the middle of the day,' said the lady. 'Creusa, my dear, will you give Mr. Dockwrath a potato. Mr. Mason, Mr. Dockwrath will probably take a bit of that chicken.'

'I would recommend him to follow the girls' example, and confine himself to the bread and butter,' said the master of the house, pushing about the scraps with his knife and fork. 'There is nothing here for him to eat.'

'My dear!' exclaimed Mrs. Mason.

'There is nothing here for him to eat,' repeated Mr. Mason. 'And as far as I can see there is nothing there either. What is it you pretend to have in that dish?'

'My dear!' again exclaimed Mrs. Mason.

'What is it?' repeated the lord of the house in an angry tone.

'Broiled ham, Mr. Mason.'

'Then let the ham be brought in,' said he. 'Diana, ring the bell.'

'But the ham is not cooked, Mr. Mason,' said the lady. 'Broiled ham is always better when it has not been first boiled.'

'Is there no cold meat in the house?' he asked.

'I am afraid not,' she replied, now trembling a little in anticipation of what might be coming after the stranger should have gone. 'You never like large joints yourself, Mr. Mason; and for ourselves we don't eat meat at luncheon.'

'Nor anybody else either, here,' said Mr. Mason in his anger.

'Pray don't mind me, Mr. Mason,' said the attorney, 'pray don't, Mr. Mason. 'I am a very poor fist at lunch; I am indeed.'

'I am sure I am very sorry, very sorry, Mr. Mason,' continued the lady. 'If I had known that an early dinner was required, it should have been provided;—although the notice given was so very short.'

'I never dine early,' said Mr. Dockwrath, thinking that some imputation of a low way of living was conveyed in this supposition that he required a dinner under the pseudonym of a lunch. 'I never do, upon my word—we are quite regular at home at half-past five, and all I ever take in the middle of the day is a biscuit and a glass of sherry,—or perhaps a bite of bread and cheese. Don't be uneasy about me, Mrs. Mason.'

The three young ladies, having now finished their repast, got up from the table and retired, following each other out of the room in

a line. Mrs. Mason remained for a minute or two longer, and then she also went. 'The carriage has been ordered at three, Mr. M.,' she said. 'Shall we have the pleasure of your company?' 'No,' growled the husband. And then the lady went, sweeping a low curtsy to Mr. Dockwrath as she passed out of the room.

There was again a silence between the host and his guest for some two or three minutes, during which Mr. Mason was endeavouring to get the lunch out of his head, and to redirect his whole mind to Lady Mason and his hopes of vengeance. There is nothing perhaps so generally consoling to a man as a well-established grievance; a feeling of having been injured, on which his mind can brood from hour to hour, allowing him to plead his own cause in his own court, within his own heart,—and always to plead it successfully. At last Mr. Mason succeeded, and he could think of his enemy's fraud and forget his wife's meanness. 'I suppose I may as well order my gig now,' said Mr. Dockwrath, as soon as his host had arrived at this happy frame of mind.

'Your gig? ah, well. Yes. I do not know that I need detain you any longer. I can assure you that I am much obliged to you, Mr. Dockwrath, and I shall hope to see you in London very shortly.'

'You are determined to go to Round and Crook, I suppose?'

'Oh, certainly.'

'You are wrong, sir. They'll throw you over again as sure as your name is Mason.'

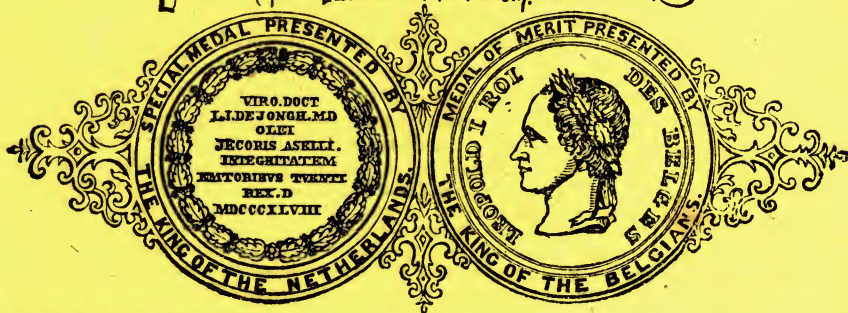
'Mr. Dockwrath, you must if you please allow me to judge of that myself.'

'Oh, of course, sir, of course. But I'm sure that a gentleman like you, Mr. Mason, will understand——'

'I shall understand that I cannot expect your services, Mr. Dockwrath,—your valuable time and services,—without remunerating you for them. That shall be fully explained to Messrs. Round and Crook.'

'Very well, sir; very well. As long as I am paid for what I do, I am content. A professional gentleman of course expects that. How is he to get along else; particular with sixteen children?' And then Mr. Dockwrath got into the gig, and was driven back to the Bull at Leeds.

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Do. Forks	36 0	48 0	54 0	70 0	60 0	78 0
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Do. Forks	27 0	38 0	44 0	50 0	44 0	54 0
Tee Spoons	16 0	20 0	24 0	32 0	27 0	36 0
Soup Ladles each	12 0	16 0	16 0	18 0	17 0	20 0
Gravy Spoons	7 0	10 0	10 0	12 0	11 0	13 0
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